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(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) A Peek Behind The Scenes: The History Of History At NSA (Part 1 of 3)

(U) Many can recall the time when it was more than half-seriously argued that the initials “NSA” expanded to “No Such Agency.” Because of the need for secrecy, among other things, NSA has had an internal effort to collect, study, and publish its own history for roughly thirty years.

(U) The tale of the Center for Cryptologic History (CCH) tells more than how NSA's history has been documented. The story of the CCH is in many ways also NSA's journey from “No Such Agency” to “Nothing Sacred Anymore.”

(U) After World War II, pioneer cryptologist William F. Friedman, doubtless with considerable personal satisfaction over his and his colleagues' contributions, asked the leadership of the Army Security Agency on March 12, 1946, for a permanent staff to evaluate the activities of the prewar period and World War II. He noted that personnel shortages “cause us to neglect the proper study of the past.... Everything not strictly operational is often neglected.” Friedman proposed a staff of nine historians.

(U) Moreover, Friedman assembled a series of six lectures on the history of cryptology. Drawing on his extensive personal collection of books, papers, and artifacts, as well as his experiences and wide contacts, he described the art from biblical times to the world war. (Delivered several times to cleared audiences, his talks were declassified in the 1970s and released in printed form).

(U) In 1949 the feckless Armed Forces Security Agency was created to try to centralize American cryptology. Among other things, AFSA appointed a historian, a Captain Kinney. Disappointingly, no information remains on his assignments or activities.

(U) In 1952 William Friedman, as he transferred from ASA to AFSA and then NSA, continued to lobby for an official historian, and saw the idea become reality.

(U) A handwritten note addressed to him on 8 February 1954 explained that Captain Thomas Dyer was to be appointed NSA Historian upon his return from an overseas assignment, expected within the month. Captain Thomas H. Dyer, USN, one of the most

important cryptanalysts of the Second World War, was appointed the first NSA historian on 24 February 1954.

(U) Dyer advised the NSA chief of staff that the proper model for NSA's histories would be the history of World War II written by Great Britain's GCHQ, which he considered the "only truly comprehensive cryptologic history [ever] written." Dyer's "tobacco-juice estimate" was that 20-30 volumes would be required to complete an equivalent, and he proposed a staff of 35 historians and clerks to do the job. The chief of staff, with admirable patience, told Dyer this was "beyond the capabilities of the limited personnel available to us for the job" and suggested he "proceed as far as practicable with the problem with the assistance now available to you."

(U) Far from his grandiose T/O, Dyer had merely two professional historians, plus a Navy yeoman and a typist, to assist him. One historian, Dr. George F. Howe, was hired from outside NSA in 1954; the other transferred into the Historian's Office from the Production Organization.

(U) In 1955 Captain Dyer took unexpected and early retirement to become a professor of mathematics at a local university. His principal assistant, Dr. George F. Howe, was named his successor. Dr. Howe brought considerable professional experience to the post: in addition to teaching, Howe had authored one of the volumes in the U.S. Army's official series on World War II, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, published in 1957.

(U) Whereas Dyer had drawn on his long experience in the SIGINT business and his relationships with those who had lived the history, Howe had had no prior SIGINT experience, was a relatively junior grade, and had no personal relationships with senior officers. Therefore, the deputy chief of staff, Captain Jack Holtwick, USN, another SIGINT "old-timer," became the unofficial sponsor for the Historian's Office within the Agency.

(U) After a major Agency reorganization in 1955, the historians were made part of the NSA Library. This gave Howe occasional rude awakenings on the workings of bureaucracy: for example, for some time Howe assumed he was releasing his typist to library duties when she was not needed in history; soon enough, he found it was the other way around.

(U) The history office had additional moves, returning to the chief of staff's office, then going to a research element in the production organization, which also turned out to be not a congenial institutional fit.

(U) Despite the dislocations, however, in this period Howe and his staff drafted an

ambitious program of historical studies and began initial research. Their goal was to construct a reliable history of NSA from the end of the Second World War to about "18 to 24 months behind the current date," and then prepare an annual update.

(U) One major problem was lack of a central repository for cryptologic records. Most were held by the component commands and committees of the intelligence community, as well as component elements within NSA. Production of any histories was predicated on a solution to this impediment.

(U) In the early stages, when Howe was looking primarily at the world war period, he could arrange to borrow documents from the Army Security Agency and the Navy. He also found it profitable to consult intermittently with William Friedman and Admiral Joseph Wenger, USN (Ret), who had been a vice- director of NSA.

(U) By the early 1960s, Howe and his staff began researching the postwar period, which required the compilation of internal NSA documents. This was a new concept, and in 1963 and 1964 he negotiated a series of agreements with NSA elements allowing him access to locally held documents and interview subjects. The agreements stipulated that the final product would be written in ways useful to the organization, and it stipulated that "higher echelons" of the organization would be afforded an opportunity to review the final product.

(U) (The problem of records management was not solved until the mid- to late 1980s, when NSA instituted a program to train cleared personnel as professional archivists and refurbish its records storage area to archival standards).

(U) Caught in a negative environment for publishing, with a few exceptions most histories in the Howe era were never distributed, even internally. For the most part, they dealt with institutional development and were characterized by sweeping design, thoroughness in research, and dryness in style. Nevertheless, the histories of the Howe era have proved invaluable to later in-house researchers in understanding early NSA structure and staffing.

(U) One important exception to the nonpublication practice was Howe's own book on direct cryptologic support in the world war. Drawing on the knowledge gained writing the equivalent official history for the Army, in 1980 Howe wrote and published American Signal Intelligence in Northwest Africa and Western Europe.

(U) Skip to 1979. A proposal was sent to Admiral Inman to expand the history program, noting that "[w]e have the leadership, enthusiasm, and information necessary to depict the role that SIGINT has played in various crisis situations." In an oft-replicated story, Admiral Inman said he "would like to do more," but a decade of retrenchment had left the Agency "woefully" short of billets, and he would have to recommend a gradualist approach.

(U) Henry F. Schorreck, who came to the history program in 1971, accepted an assignment in one of NSA's operational elements, but soon returned to history. In 1981, after George Howe's retirement and a short transition period, Schorreck became the NSA historian.

(U) Under his leadership great strides were made in organizing and researching a somewhat inchoate mass of historical documents. Most of the records were stored in rather dismal conditions at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, at best in neglect, at worst in danger of deliberate destruction. In at least one case, that of the files of Herbert Yardley's "Black Chamber" of the 1920s, an important collection was rescued from the burn bag through Schorreck's efforts.

(U) Schorreck himself published little, but under his guidance, research/writing and occasional publishing were done by re-employed annuitants, a series of interns, and other short-term assignees. Complementing the organizational studies completed under George Howe, these writers produced classified studies of NSA's crisis response.

(U) One detailee from this period was Earl J. "Jerry" Coates, who came originally on a fellowship in 1975, and returned to the program to coordinate the loan of cryptologic equipment to public institutions. He remained to manage the history program's museum collection.

(U) In the late 1970s and early 1980s, NSA began to open -- ever so slightly -- to the public. The history program became an important tool in this process.

(U) Cryptology, once considered an NSA preserve, increasingly became a subject of academic writing and public discussion. The publication of several important books by commercial or academic presses, among them David Kahn's *The Codebreakers* and Frederick Winterbottom's *The ULTRA Secret*, stimulated interest in cryptologic history.

(U) Not without soul-searching, NSA undertook more interaction with scholars and the public. The director or other senior officials made occasional public speeches, and the Agency began a program of declassification of documents from the world war period. This ran counter to a highly developed culture of secrecy and defensiveness, but the success of each type of public endeavor encouraged additional steps.

(U) As would happen again in the following two decades, NSA's decision to open itself somewhat to the public included a strong role for the history program.

(U) In 1979 the director of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History asked the DIRNSA, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, for assistance in an exhibit of cipher machines. Inman responded positively and authorized equipment loan. The DIRNSA did

ask for special security procedures and that there be no announcement of NSA's participation, although the request for nonattribution was subsequently withdrawn. The two directors opened the exhibit on 26 February 1981.

(U) Items lent to the Smithsonian included pre-world war U.S. cipher equipment, the German ENIGMA machine, and other German and Japanese devices of World War II. The SIGABA, the highest-level U.S. cipher machine of the war, was also loaned, although some wiring, still considered classified, was removed before the machines were sent to the Mall.

(U) A cryptanalytic Bombe, probably the last surviving model out of about 125 in service during World War II, was brought from storage in spring 1985, cleaned, and put on display in a walkway between two buildings at the NSA complex at Fort Meade. In 1987 the Smithsonian and NSA's history program agreed to a long-term loan of the Bombe for the new Information Age exhibit at the Museum of American History.

(U) The presence of this equipment at the Smithsonian, together with the declassification program, generated considerable public response. Increasingly, the history program found itself responding to inquiries from researchers and scholars from outside NSA. The program's external relations seemed quite successful, although the overall health of the program came into peril.

(U) In March 1980 the history program was combined with Archives and Declassification, and in May 1981 this agglomeration was transferred to the Telecommunications Organization as the Office of Archives and History (T54). Schorreck became a technical advisor to the chief, T54. During this period, the history program had difficulty retaining its professional staff, who were dissatisfied with senior management support, few career opportunities, and lack of recognition.

(U) Then came a fateful meeting.

(U) On the first of December 1988, the history staff presented a briefing on its activities to the new NSA director, Admiral William O. Studeman, plus the deputy director, and the chief of staff. Admiral Studeman showed himself interested in the program, and issued instructions on the use of history in educating NSA employees and the preservation of records.

(U) Driven by concerns over personnel losses and lack of organizational support, and encouraged by the new director's receptivity to the history briefing, Henry Schorreck took the unusual and dangerous step of sending a letter straight to the director. Schorreck warned that a "combination of circumstances is driving the NSA History Program toward extinction" or the "destruction of professional integrity."

(U) The gamble paid off. What could have been a career-ending action for Schorreck instead spurred Admiral Studeman to study the question of history at NSA. Studeman, who had majored in history at the University of the South, understood its value in a large institution, and he was receptive to a proposal for reconstitution of the program.

(U) Studeman turned to the NSA History Committee, a somewhat moribund advisory group, then chaired by David W. Gaddy. Gaddy was a senior executive, with broad experience in many facets of cryptologic activity, who had been picked to lead the History Committee because he frequently expounded on the value of history and professional education to NSA to anyone who would listen.

(U) In August Gaddy recommended that the history program remain in its institutional locale, but use the History Committee to solve the perceived professional problems. The director signed Gaddy's recommended response to Schorreck's letter, but added a handwritten note inviting the latter for a chat to discuss options.

(U) During a meeting with Schorreck on 28 August, Admiral Studeman expressed his opinion that the history program was misplaced organizationally, saying it should be "closely aligned with the office of the Director." Schorreck quickly agreed.

(U) A week later, following up, the chief of staff met with Gaddy, instructed him to draft a proposal for a new organization at the Directorate level, and asked whether he would consider heading it up.

(U) Vice Admiral William O. Studeman, noting that "we cannot afford to lose the hard-earned experience of the past, the innovative technical and operational accomplishments, and the personal examples of selfless service," established the Center for Cryptologic History on 9 November 1989. He also said at that time that history is "an essential, but often overlooked, mission asset."

(U) The first director of the CCH, David W. Gaddy, moved quickly to establish a concept of operations, then to solve multiple pressing problems of personnel and space. Gaddy's concepts included a wide range of activities, such as a scholar-in-residence from outside the Agency and public displays of cryptologic artifacts. In addition, Gaddy recognized and capitalized on an opportunity to establish NSA's public museum (the subject of part 3 in this series).

(U) The Center had come into existence with five of the tiniest divisions in the entire U.S. government. Personnel soon found that notwithstanding the prestige of being on the director's staff, they continued to face acute struggles for resources and personnel.

(U) Vice Admiral J. Michael McConnell, when he became DIRNSA in 1992, felt that too many groups and individuals reported directly to him, and instituted a sweeping reorganization to simplify his staff arrangements. The CCH was one of the elements removed from his personal staff.

(U) In an interesting maneuver, the CCH was reunited with the telecommunications organization it had left three years previously, subordinate to some of the same supervisors. Some staffers considered this "Old Home Week," some understood more than ever that "what goes around comes around."

(U) The difference was, now the Center had caught the attention of the Agency's seniors. Over the next few years to the time of this writing, high-level interest would only increase, never decrease. Four directors sought to elevate NSA's public profile and realized that declassified history was one important tool for accomplishing this.

(U) David Gaddy, who had been director of the CCH during its time at Directorate level, was too high in grade to serve as a branch chief, so Henry Schorreck became CCH director cum branch chief in the new organization. When Schorreck elected to retire in May 1993, David A. Hatch (author of this article) became the new director and chief.

(U) When the Directorate for Support Services was disestablished in 2000, the CCH was resubordinated to the Public Affairs Office. In 2001, when the National Cryptologic School began rebuilding, the new commandant asked that the History Center be put in the Associate Directorate for Education and Training. This was done, although the PAO retained control of the National Cryptologic Museum.

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